CEA Information Note

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The Length of the School Day and School Year in Canada

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INTRODUCTION

THIS BRIEF INFORMATION NOTE sets out the sections from the legislation and regulations pertaining to what each province and territory in Canada stipulates as the length of the school day and the length of the school year. The legislation usually includes the length of the vacations and holidays taken by both pupils and teachers. The September to June school year is still the traditional period for most schools across Canada, and the hours are usually 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Of course, there are many variations on these days and hours, particularly in those provinces where local school boards set the school calendar themselves, and the idea of a modified school calendar, or year-round school, as it is sometimes called, has been discussed off and on by most provinces for some time.

The Modified School Year idea is called by a number of names — year-round education, full school utilization, non-traditional school year, multiple vacation plan. All call for a shift from the traditional September to June months to a system of blocks of instruction time separated by blocks of holidays. Students are in school the same number of days and still take the traditional Christmas vacation as well as the statutory holidays. The traditional summer holidays, are, however, divided into blocks that occur at different times.

Variations include a Monday to Thursday (8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.) week, making a longer day and a longer weekend for students. Friday can be used for professional development days for teachers or an enrichment day for students wanting it. Another system has a block of 45 days of instruction followed by a 15-day break - the quadmester system. The trimester system has 60-day blocks of instruction interspersed with four-week vacations.

Both the three- or four-cycle systems mean that 75%-80% of the students are in school at any given block of time. This reduces the number of classrooms and teachers needed at any one time, one of the benefits cited by the proponents of year-round schooling. Advocates also say that students are better for continuous learning (especially special needs students and those learning English or French as a second language) and retain the material better (forgetting less over a shorter vacation time). Students are also less bored and keep up a higher interest in and more enthusiasm for school. They also point out that under a modified school year, there would be more seasonal job opportunities and alternative holiday times for students.

The more pragmatic proponents mention the benefits of a more efficient use of school buildings and the deterrent to vandalism that keeping schools open provides. They also say that the cycle system would solve some of the problems of overcrowded schools by more evenly distributing students in instructional times throughout the year.

Those against changing to the year-round cycles cite drawbacks such as loss of school spirit or cohesion (since 20% of the student body would miss certain activities and events), administrator burnout, and the inefficient use of specialist teachers that don't teach all students. And one must take into account the emotional attachment to the traditional

holidays that a good number of parents, students and teachers hold. The sociological needs of the students and community, personal, family and community patterns all need to be considered when thinking of instituting a modified school year.

One lone school in British Columbia (Williams Lake) has been trying out a modified school calendar, but in the United States some 1.3 million students in 1700 schools in 23 states have some form of year-round school. [1]

In Canada, a new organization, the Canadian Centre for Year-Round Education (Suite 12-115, 252 Bloor St. West, Toronto, Ont. M5S 1V5 Tel. 416-944-2652), has been recently established to help school boards and others weigh the pros and cons of a modified school calendar and to assist them in sorting out the benefits and risks. The Centre also helps them to see if the problems of implementation outweigh the incentives for change. It is neither a lobby group nor an advocacy organization; it produces a quarterly newsletter discussing year-round education issues and provides speakers and consultants for a modest fee.

YUKON TERRITORY

THE *EDUCATION ACT (1990)* provides for the minister — or, where a school board has been established, the school board — to specify on or before March 31, for each school operated by it, the school opening date, the number and the days of school operation, the length of the school day, and the number of minutes of classroom instruction in a school day. School boards that operate in the same community must establish the same school year.

In each school year there are 950 hours of instruction, including 15 hours that are to be used for non-instructional purposes. Classroom instruction is to be not fewer than 300 minutes and not more than 330 minutes. The exception is grade 1, in which the number shall not be fewer than 270 minutes. Kindergarten sessions consist of up to 330 minutes of instructional time in a school day, but no student attends a kindergarten session in excess of 165 minutes of instructional time a day unless authorized by the minister or the school board. A program of kindergarten instruction consists of 475 hours each school year, inclusive of 71/2 hours designated as professional development and administrative time for teachers.

Every school year includes a winter vacation period that extends from at least December 21 to January 2, and one other vacation period of at least four weeks' duration. Statutory holidays are school holidays. In the Yukon, there is a statutory holiday in February — Heritage Day — in addition to the commonly recognized holidays of Labour Day, Thanksgiving, Remembrance Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday and Victoria Day.

This flexible approach, the Yukon Department of Education believes, allows communities to address needs unique to them. For example, in 1991 the school council in Dawson City recommended a calendar that had students start classes in mid-August and, because of a longer than usual

[1] Seth Mydans, "In an Assault on Tradition, More Schools Last All Year," *New York Times*, 18 August 1991.

school day, finish in late May. (In that community fall is underway in August and the long daylight hours of summer begin in May in the Yukon.) The usual end of the school year in late June meant that students missed a great deal of Dawson's summer. As well, they found it difficult to study during the late nights that come with the midnight sun. Many of the senior students also work in Dawson's tourist industry, and an earlier end to the school year reduced the problems they encountered in finding and holding jobs.

***Education Act (1990)**, Section 46*
***Kindergarten Regulation** 2 (1) (2) (3); Order-in-Council 1991/68*

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

THE *EDUCATION ACT* of the Northwest Territories states that a school day shall consist of a minimum of 5 hours and a maximum of 5 1/2 hours for students during their first six years of school. After the sixth year the minimum is 5 1/4 hours and the maximum is 5 3/4 hours. Kindergarten children attend the program for no more than 3 hours any school day.

There are in addition recess periods during the morning and afternoon sessions and a lunch period each school day in all elementary schools. At each secondary school, there is also a lunch period each school day. Opening and closing times of schools, including recess and lunch periods, are established by the local education authority or community education council.

A school must be in session a minimum of 190 days in each academic year, plus 5 professional development days. The school board, in consultation with the community education council, recommends to the minister the opening and closing dates for the school year. At the request of the local education authority, the minister of education may declare that, for any academic year, schools in that division may be in session not fewer than 170 days. In 1990-1991, for example, Yellowknife schools opened on September 4 and closed on June 28, the traditional length of school year in Canada. The usual statutory holidays are also observed.

The Northwest Territories *Education Act* does not stipulate the number of hours a teacher must teach per day or per week. The principal of each school assigns the duties to the teachers of his or her school.

Education Act
Sections 97, 98, 100 (1) (2), 101 (1((2), 102, 106

BRITISH COLUMBIA

IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, the school boards are responsible for the school calendar within their own school districts, and, subject to the regulations, they specify the school opening date, the number and days of school operation, the length of the school day, the number of minutes of school

operation in a school day, the number and length of recesses, the number of minutes of classroom instruction and the vacation periods in a school year. In addition, each school board must publish, at least annually, a schedule of the days and hours of operation of the schools in its district.

A board must provide a minimum of 475 hours of instruction (including recess or scheduled breaks between classes to a maximum of 25 hours) in the school year to each student who reaches 5 years of age on or before December 31 in that school year, 950 hours of instruction (including a maximum of 50 hours of recess or scheduled breaks between classes) to each student in each of the next seven school years, 1045 hours of instruction (including a maximum of 65 hours of scheduled breaks between classes) to each student in each school year following those seven years and continuing until the student is no longer of school age.

A board must offer a minimum of 190 days of instruction in every school in each school year (but in 1992-93 the maximum is 187 days) and where a strike or lockout occurs on a school day, the hours of instruction that had been scheduled for that day are included for the purposes of determining whether or not a board meets the requirements of this section. Additional days in session for teachers are determined by locally negotiated contracts.

The province's *Independent School Act* provides that the Minister of Education can establish educational standards in respect of independent school authorities and a Ministerial Order, which became effective February 15, 1991, sets out the minimum number of hours of instruction each independent school authority must offer each student in each school year. The minimum for students enrolled in the first year of an educational program is 425 hours of instruction; 765 hours each school year to students in the second or third year; and 850 hours of instruction to students in the fourth to the eleventh year of an educational program.

***School Act**, S.B.C. 1989, c. 61, Section 96 (1) (2)*
***School Regulation**, B.C. Reg. 265/89, amended effective July 1, 1992, Section 8, 8.1*
***Independent School Act**, S.B.C. 1989, c. 51, Section 4 (b)*
***Educational Standards Order**, Ministerial Order 41/91, Section 3*

ALBERTA

THE *SCHOOL ACT*, SECTION 40, states that a school board shall specify the school opening date, the number and the days of school operation, the length of the school day, the number and length of recesses, and, the number of hours of instruction, subject to Section 25 (which outlines what the minister may approve, prescribe or order adopted and allows the minister to prescribe the instruction time for courses of study and education programs). The Alberta Department of Education, however, encourages schools to be more flexible in the time allocated for each course. Section 25 (1)(c) also allows the Minister to prescribe the minimum total hours of instruction a board must make available to a student in a school year. The *Elementary School Handbook* requires a board to offer elementary students in grades 2 to 6 at least 950 hours of instruc-

tional time a year. For grade 1, alternative minimum times can be set at the local level, but these alternatives must be reported to the Department of Education. Early Childhood Education operators must give a minimum of 400 instructional hours a year. (When no kindergarten is offered by a school board, it is provided by a private incorporated non-profit society.)

The *Junior High Handbook* requires schools to ensure that junior high students (grades 7 to 9) have access to 950 hours of instruction a year at each grade. In accordance with the *Senior High Handbook*, senior high (grades 10 to 12) schools must give students access to at least 25 hours of instruction per high school credit and at least 1000 hours of instruction a year. (Instructional time is defined as time scheduled for purposes of instruction, examinations, and other student activities where direct student-teacher interaction and supervision are maintained.)

Vacation periods must include a winter vacation that extends at least from December 24 to January 2, and there must be an opportunity for each student to take one school vacation of at least four consecutive weeks' duration in each calendar year. A board may also declare one day a month to be a school holiday. In Alberta a board may also declare the second Friday of June to be a Farmer's Day holiday.

The board must also notify the minister of the opening and closing dates of all schools under its jurisdiction before May 31 each year for the 12-month period next following and the dates of the vacation periods.

Under Section 78(2), unless the teacher agrees, a board may not require a teacher to instruct students for more than 330 minutes (5.5 hours) during a teaching day, or for fewer than 190 teaching days or more than 200 teaching days in a school year.

School Act
Section 40 (1) (2) (3) (4) (5); 25 (1) (a) (c); 78 (2)

SASKATCHEWAN

THE LENGTH OF THE SCHOOL DAY in Saskatchewan is generally 5.5 hours: from 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon and from 1:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. A board may alter or shorten the school hours up to 30 minutes without the approval of the minister of education. Kindergarten hours are determined by the board.

Pupils have a recess period of 15 minutes in the morning and afternoon of each school day, or a recess period (or periods) amounting to 30 minutes in each day. Where a board passes a resolution on the recommendation of the director or superintendent, pupils in that division may be allowed recess period(s) from 5 to 25 minutes in the morning and afternoon, or recess period(s) amounting from 20 to 40 minutes in each school day.

Legislation states that there must be 200 school days in a school year, but the minister may, in any year, by order, determine that there be fewer school days. In 1992-93 there will be 197 days in the school year.

A year of kindergarten is the equivalent of not fewer than 80 school days (usually 2.5 hours a day).

The school boards determine the opening and closing dates of the schools and the general schedule for the school year, but the school must be divided into two terms ending on December 31 and June 30 respectively; two semesters ending January 31 and June 30 respectively; or other such periods as determined by the board and approved by the minister. The board must publish the opening and closing dates on or before May 1 each year. Schools observe the usual statutory holidays, Saturdays and Sundays, as well as any day proclaimed as a holiday by the Governor-General, Lieutenant-Governor or mayor. Christmas vacation must begin not later than December 23 and extend to at least January 2. There is also a spring vacation for five days after Easter Sunday and a summer vacation of not fewer than six weeks immediately after July 1.

The number of required hours of instruction for teachers is not covered by provincial legislation or by provincial collective bargaining agreement. Hours of work and other terms and conditions of employment for teachers are negotiated locally between individual boards and the teachers. The amount of preparation time that teachers are allowed within the school week varies also within school divisions between elementary and high school teachers.

The Education Act
Section 164 (1) (2) (3) (5); 165 (1) (3) (4) (5) (6); 166 (1); 167 (1)

MANITOBA

UNLESS THE MINISTER gives specific written approval of other arrangements, the instruction day shall not have fewer than 5 1/2 hours, including recesses, but excluding the midday intermission. The school board may, by resolution, determine the hours of opening and closing as well as the time and duration of the midday intermission. Although the legislation does not mention kindergarten hours specifically (since it is an optional program), kindergarten children usually attend half the instructional time (either alternate whole days or half-days every day).

For grades 1 to 6 inclusive, recess is not fewer than 10 and not more than 15 minutes each morning and afternoon, and not less than 1 hour, or more than 1 1/2 hours, during the middle of the school day; every child at those levels shall be given these recesses.

The school year is divided into two terms: fall and spring. For fall term 1992, the school year will begin on September 1 and conclude the Friday preceding the week in which December 24 falls (December 18). Spring term 1993 begins the Monday following January 1 (January 4) and ends June 30. This provides for a total of 197 teaching days, of which 10 are used for teacher in-service, parent-teacher conferences, administration, and pupil evaluation.

The number of hours of classroom instruction required of teachers is decided at the local school division/district level.

The minister may make regulations prescribing the length of vaca-

tions, the number of teaching days in the year and the hours that shall be school hours for pupils. Except for Remembrance Day (November 11), whenever a holiday falls on a Sunday, the next day shall be a school holiday. (Saturdays and Sundays are always holidays, unless the approval of the minister is gained to teach in a school on a Saturday.)

The Public Schools Act
Section 76 ; 78 (1) (2) (3)
Manitoba Regulation *470/88R*

ONTARIO

IN ACCORDANCE WITH Regulation 822, the school year starts on or after the 1st day of September and ends on or before the 30th day of June. A school year includes a minimum of 194 school days of which up to 9 days may be designated by the board as professional activity days; the remaining days are instructional days. Where a board designates more than 9 professional activity days, the number of days in excess of 9 is added to the number of instructional days.

Holidays consist of a Christmas vacation of 14 consecutive days beginning on the Monday next following the Friday preceding the 21st day of December; but when the 21st day of December is a Thursday or a Friday, they start on the Monday next following. There is also a vacation period of five consecutive days commencing on the Monday next following the Friday preceding the 14th day of March. As well as every Saturday and Sunday, Canada Day (July 1) if the school is open during July, Labour Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Victoria Day and a day appointed by the Governor-General or the Lieutenant Governor as a public holiday or for Thanksgiving are all holidays.

Every year a board must submit a proposed school calendar on or before the 1st day of May in respect of the school year next following.

The length of the instructional program of each school day for students of compulsory school age must not be fewer than 5 hours a day excluding recesses or scheduled intervals between classes. The school day begins not earlier than 8 a.m. and ends not later than 5 p.m. except with the approval of the Minister. However, a board may reduce the length of the instructional program on each school day to fewer than 5 hours a day for an exceptional pupil in a special education program. Every board may establish the length of the instructional program on each school day for pupils in junior kindergarten and kindergarten. A scheduled interval between classes for the lunch break for pupils and teachers shall not be fewer than 40 consecutive minutes.

In the intermediate division and the senior division, a principal may, subject to the approval of the board, provide for recesses or intervals for pupils between periods. Every board must determine the period of time during each school day when its buildings and playgrounds are open to its pupils, but in every case the buildings and playgrounds shall be open to pupils during the period beginning 15 minutes before classes begin for the day and ending 15 minutes after classes end for the day.

There is a morning recess and an afternoon recess, each of which is not less than 10 minutes and not more than 15 minutes for pupils in the primary and junior divisions.

There is no statutory or regulatory provision that stipulates the number of hours that a teacher must teach per day or week. Although subsection 3(1) of Regulation 262 states that "the length of the instructional program of each school day ... shall be not less than 5 hours a day ...", this does not mean that each teacher must teach at least 5 hours each day. The actual number of hours that each teacher in Ontario must teach per day or week is determined locally and may be part of the collective agreement between the teachers and the school board.

Education Act Regulations
Ont. Regulation 262 under the Education Act, Section 3
Ont. Regulation 822/82, Section 2

QUEBEC

FOR KINDERGARTEN PUPILS school is in session for a maximum of 200 half-days of which at least 180, 5 days a week (minimum of 11 hours, 45 minutes), must be devoted to instructional teaching.

For elementary and secondary students, the school year consists of a maximum of 200 days, of which at least 180, 5 full days (minimum of 23 hours and 30 minutes at elementary, and 25 hours at secondary) a week, must be devoted to instructional activities. Pupils have a minimum of 50 minutes for midday lunch as well as a recess period, morning and afternoon at elementary school, and at least 5 minutes between each class at secondary school, over the prescribed time.

At kindergarten, as well as at elementary and secondary school, holidays include July 1, the first Monday in September, December 24, 25 and 26 of December, December 31 and January 1 and 2, Good Friday, Easter Monday and June 24.

The school year for teachers is 200 days which are distributed from September 1 to June 30. Opening and closing dates are determined by the school board between these two dates. The regular work week is 5 days (27 hours), in a weekly schedule of 35 hours, from Monday to Friday.

***Basic School Regulations for Preschool and Elementary School Education**, O. C.73 - 90 (24 January 1990). Education Act (1988, c 84), Sections 29,30,31,43*
***Basic School Regulations for Secondary School Education**, O. C.74-90 (24 January 1990) Education Act (1988, c.84), Sections 31,32,33*
Entente intervenue entre le Comité patronal de négociation des commissions scolaires pour catholiques et les syndicats d'enseignantes et d'enseignants représentés par la Centrale de l'enseignement du Québec, 1989-91
Entente intervenue entre le Comité patronal de négociation des commissions scolaires pour protestants et l'Association provinciale des enseignants protestants du Québec, 1989-90

NEW BRUNSWICK

EACH SCHOOL BOARD must provide a minimum number of hours of instruction per day, exclusive of the noon recess, as follows: 4 hours for the first 2 years of elementary school; 5 hours for the remaining years of elementary and junior high school; and 5.5 hours for senior high school students.

The school year consists of 194 days of which up to 12 are allowed for professional development activities, parent-teacher interviews and opening and closing administration.

A *Schools Act Regulation* states that all schools shall have a summer vacation beginning July 1 and ending on the Saturday immediately preceding Labour Day, unless otherwise varied by the minister of education for any school district for any school year; a two-week winter vacation that begins on the Saturday preceding Christmas Day; and a one-week spring vacation that begins on the Saturday preceding the first Monday in March.

No stipulation is made on the number of hours a teacher must teach per day or week.

School Administration Regulation - Schools Act
Regulation 84-51, Section (2) (5) (8)

NOVA SCOTIA

THE REGULATIONS under the *Education Act* require 5 hours of teaching in each classroom on each school day, but provide for a school board, at its discretion, to reduce the teaching time to not fewer than 3 hours a day in grades primary, 1 or 2, or in classrooms on double shift, or to increase it to a maximum of 6 hours at any level. Increases in the school day for grades primary to 2 require the approval of the Minister of Education.

A school board may direct that a recess of not more than 15 minutes shall be allowed for any class on each school day, but it is not required to provide a recess for any high school class or classes.

The school year consists of 195 teaching days, of which no more than 8 are allowed for professional development, organizational and administrative purposes (a minimum of 187 instructional days). Schools shall open not earlier than September 1 and not later than the Wednesday following Labour Day and close not later than June 30. Christmas vacation begins not earlier than and ends not later than dates fixed by the minister each year and consists of December 25, January 1 and not fewer than 5 or more than 10 school days. Spring vacation is 5 consecutive school days in March, determined by the minister.

Regulation under the Education Act/ pursuant to Sec. 5.
2 (1) (2) (2a) (3) (4); 1 (1) (2)

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

A SCHOOL DAY shall consist of a minimum of 5 hours of instruction; however, regional school boards may make adjustments in the length of the school day for primary grades (1-3).

The school year typically consists of 196 days, 5 of which are for teachers only. In addition, teachers have 5 professional development days (for in-service or attending conferences) guaranteed under the Teachers' Memorandum of Agreement. As well, a school board, if it so wants, can provide more professional development days for teachers.

The first school day (Orientation Day) in any school year is the Tuesday following Labour Day and the first full teaching day is the day immediately following Orientation Day. The last school day in the calendar is December 23 (except when it falls on a Saturday or Sunday when the last day is December 21). After the Christmas vacation, school begins on January 3 and ends the Friday of the third full week in June. A mid-term break of 5 days is usually held during the third week of March. Labour Day, Thanksgiving, Remembrance Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday and Victoria Day are also school holidays.

School Act Regulations
Part V, Division B - School Calendar, Sections 5.10 to 5.20

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

LEGISLATION directs that the length of the school day at various grade levels be as follows: the minimum number of hours of instruction during each school day is 2.5 hours for kindergarten, 4 hours for grades 1 to 3, and 5 hours for grades 4 to 12.

Unless assigned to other duties by the school principal or absent because of illness or other unavoidable cause, every teacher shall be in the appropriate school during a period in the forenoon and a period in the afternoon immediately preceding the time prescribed for the opening of school, which is laid down by the regulations, rules or by-laws of the appropriate school board.

The minister sets, before June 1 each year, the opening and closing dates for the school year. The overall length of the school year is 190 days, of which 185 days must be teaching days.

Present legislation does not set any minimum number of hours a teacher must teach (instruct in the classroom) per day or per week.

School boards and school administrators use their staff resources according to board and school policy.

The Schools Act
Chapter 346, Sections 51, 55, 57

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Mission Statement

The Canadian Education Association pursues the improvement of education and serves the education community by providing opportunities to study issues of common interest; to share ideas, experiences and information; to establish and maintain linkages with government bodies, non-government agencies and individuals; to analyze trends and directions through research; and to participate in learning activities.

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